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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: FROM THE LIBYAN PEOPLE: A TUAREG "DISARMAMENT"
PHOTO-OP NEAR GAO

REF: 08 BAMAKO 00305

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary: Approximately 140 Idnane Tuaregs symbolically disarmed and incinerated their weapons on January 19 in the town of Bourem north of Gao. The Malian press, which has a tendency to conflate the various groups of northern Malian Tuaregs, compared the ceremony to the 1996 Flame of Peace ceremony that marked the end of northern Mali's 1991-1996 rebellion and portrayed the January 19 ceremony in Bourem as a significant victory in the Malian government's battle against Tuareg rebel Ibrahim ag Bahanga. In truth, very few of the Idnane Tuaregs who "disarmed" at Bourem were involved in skirmishes with the Malian army in 2008, and most were likely never connected to either the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) or Bahanga's Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC). As a result, the ceremony was largely a photo-op designed to show support for those supportive of a peaceful resolution to the Tuareg conflict. Not coincidentally, the same Idnane leaders who organized the January 19 ceremony traveled to Libya a week later as guests of Muammar Qadhafi. End Summary

First the Photo-Op, Then the Trip to Tripoli

2.(U) On January 19, 2009, 140 Idnane Tuaregs "disarmed" and incinerated their weapons in a bonfire in the town of Bourem north of Gao. The ceremony was designed to mimic the 1996 Flame of Peace in Timbuktu, which effectively ended northern Mali's 1991-1996 rebellion and enjoyed the participation of every rebel faction. This 2009 event involved just one group of Malian Tuaregs led by Ahmed ag Boya, a community leader and Customs Inspector; Mohamed ag Erlaf, a former Malian government Minister and currently Director of the Malian Agency for Local Investment; and Eghless ag Oufene. Some Malian press reports also claimed that the 140 Idnanes previously belonged to Bahanga's ATNMC and therefore dealt Bahanga a serious blow by burning their weapons and supporting the Malian government's negotiation efforts.

3.(U) "On Tuesday we deposed, without condition, our arms," ag Oufene told the media, "because we wanted to accept the hand outstretched by the President of the Republic, Amadou Toumani Toure. There are 140 of us, and we are all from the Idnane tribe, and we want peace for our country." Other notable participants included the Governor of Gao, General Amadou Baba Toure, and Libya's Consul to Mali, Moussa Koni. Malian television covered the ceremony on January 21.

4.(C) Neither ag Boya nor ag Erlaf have been involved in current Tuareg unrest. Ag Oufene used work as an accountant for a UN funded agricultural development program in Kidal until March 2008 when he left with a cash box and a project vehicle to lead a failed attack on the Malian military

outpost in Aguelhok that left seven children wounded (Ref. A). Ag Oufene, however, is distinct from both the ADC and the ATNMC and likely represents few, if any, actual Tuareg rebels. Idnanes who are associated with the Tuareg rebellion are led by National Assembly Deputy and renowned trafficker Deity ag Sidamou and Baye ag Hamdi. No members of this Idnane group participated in the disarmament ceremony. Libya reportedly provided as much as 50 million CFA or USD 100,000 to support the ceremony. On January 26 the ag Erlaf, ag Boya, ag Oufene and other Idnane leaders were received by Qadhafi in Tripoli.

Comment: A PR Stunt

5.(C) The "disarmament" of Idnane Tuaregs north of Gao was clearly a PR stunt. Less clear is whether this stunt was organized by Qadhafi, or the Government of Mali, or some combination of the two. The event generated some positive press for Mali, presuming those reading the news reports or watching Malian TV are unable to differentiate between Tuaregs comprising the rebel movement and other Tuaregs who have remained on the sidelines. Libya's evident involvement also indicated that Qadhafi is still seeking, despite Algeria's place as Mali's preferred mediator, to reinforce his image as the Sahara's principal peace-maker.

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